

NSC REVIEW  
COMPLETED

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

By

James S. Lay, Jr.  
Asst. Executive Secretary



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The complex and numerous problems facing this nation and the governmental machinery required to handle them place an extremely heavy administrative burden upon the President of the United States. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of national security. In its broadest sense this field involves practically every Department and Agency of the Government and is affected to some degree by practically every governmental policy. Yet each Department or Agency has its own field of responsibility and is a spokesman for its particular point of view. The President must reconcile, correlate, coordinate and integrate all of these diverse interests into national policies which will insure the security of the United States.

Recognizing this problem and its vital importance, the President recommended and Congress in the National Security Act of 1947 provided for the creation of a National Security Council "to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the services and the other Departments and Agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security." The President himself was designated to preside over this Council. The other permanent members are the Secretary of State, to present considerations of foreign policy; the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, to present considerations of military policy; and the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board, to present considerations concerning the coordination of domestic, military, industrial and civilian mobilization. As required in specific cases and as designated by the President, the Secretaries of the other Executive Departments, the Chairman of the Munitions Board and the Chairman of the Research and Development Board may also sit as Council members.

The National Security Council, except for its direction of the Central Intelligence Agency, is purely an advisory body to the President. It does not itself determine policy. The end result of its deliberations are recommendation to the President who may accept, reject or modify them in his determination of the policies relating to the national security.

Through this new vehicle, therefore, the President is assured that the views of the heads of all Departments and Agencies concerned with the national security have been considered and so far as possible mutually

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agreed upon prior to Presidential consideration. The Council is in no way a buffer to insulate the President, nor does it detract from or infringe upon the prerogatives of the various Executive Departments and Agencies. On the contrary, it insures that all views are heard and, if agreement cannot be reached, that the divergent opinions are presented to the President.

In order to assist the Council in obtaining and reconciling the views of all interested Departments and Agencies, the National Security Act of 1947 provides the Council with a staff headed by a civilian executive secretary appointed by the President. The first Executive Secretary is Sidney W. Souers. Mr. Souers, a business executive in New Orleans and St. Louis in civilian life, served as a reserve officer in Naval Intelligence during the war and was Deputy Chief of Naval Intelligence when he reverted to inactive status in 1946. Subsequently, he helped to organize the National Intelligence Authority and the Central Intelligence Group, and was the first Director of Central Intelligence. Having completed the formative stages of CIG, he returned to civilian life, but was recently recalled to Washington as a consultant on intelligence matters to the Atomic Energy Commission.

To advise and assist Mr. Souers, each head of a Department represented on the Council has designated his chief policy or operational planner. George F. Kennan, Foreign Service Officer and Director of the Policy Planning Staff, represents the Department of State. The other representatives are Lt. Gen. A. C. Wedemeyer from the Army, Rear Admiral C. W. Styer from the Navy (pending the designation of a successor to Vice Admiral Forrest P. Sherman), and Lt. Gen. Lauris Norstad from the Air Force. In addition, R. H. Hillenkoetter, Director of Central Intelligence, normally participates as a member of this group, generally referred to as the "NSC Consultants."

The NSC staff itself, except for Mr. Souers and James S. Lay, Assistant Executive Secretary, consists largely of individuals detailed from the offices of the above Consultants. The Department of State furnishes the coordinator of this working staff. George H. Butler, former U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, served temporarily as the first coordinator but no successor has been chosen. The other members detailed to the staff are Henry S. Villard, Foreign Service Officer from the Department of State, Lt. Col. Douglas V. Johnson from the Army, Captain B. L. Austin from the Navy, and Col. R. C. Heflebower from the Air Force. Foreign Service Officer Prescott Childs, who is at present assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency, represents that body,

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while a representative of the National Security Resource Board will soon be designated. Permanent members of the staff include Marion W. Boggs, formerly of the Department of State, and a small group of specially qualified research and clerical personnel. It is planned to expand this permanent staff gradually by the addition of carefully selected career personnel who have outstanding abilities as students and analysts of world affairs.

This NSC staff works as a team in the preparation of reports for consideration by the Council. The first step is usually a meeting of the staff to define the subject and scope of a given report. Each staff member then obtains the facts, views and opinions of his Department or Agency on the subject from its particular point of view. For example, the political and economic aspects are obtained from the Department of State; the military aspects from the Army, Navy and Air Force; the intelligence estimate from the Central Intelligence Agency; and considerations of domestic resources from the National Security Resources Board. A second staff meeting is called to analyze the facts and to discuss and reconcile, in general terms, the varying views and opinions. One member is usually designated to prepare a first draft based upon this discussion. Each member checks this draft with all interested branches of his Department or Agency, and another staff meeting is held to reconcile any remaining divergencies and to agree upon a final staff draft. This draft is then sent to the NSC Consultants for their reactions. When their concurrence is obtained, the report is submitted to the Council for consideration at its next meeting. If appropriate, the Secretary of Defense obtains the military comments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff prior to the Council meeting. The report as adopted by the Council is then submitted for consideration by the President.

The duties of the Council\* specifically assigned by the National Security Act of 1947 are:

(1) to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the President in connection therewith; and

(2) to consider policies on matters of common interest to the Departments and Agencies of the Government concerned with the national security, and to make recommendations to the President in connection therewith.

\*See Chart.

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Policies considered by the Council under (2) above run the gamut of our national security interests including such matters as export control, foreign information programs, base rights, etc. These generally are referred to the Council by one of its members or as a result of study by interdepartmental organizations such as the State-Army-Navy-Air Force coordinating Committee and, after consideration, are submitted to the President. If approved by him, all appropriate Departments and Agencies are directed to implement such policies, usually subject to the coordination of the cabinet member having primary interest in the subject. The Council, being an advisory body, does not participate in the implementation of such approved policies.

The preparation of reports required by (1) above has been made a continuing assignment to the NSC staff. This is being accomplished by the preparation of reports on the position of the United States with respect to specific countries or world areas in order of priority based upon their relative urgency and importance. From these country and area studies, reports on a world-wide basis are being formulated. When completed, this series of reports will present to the President a clear and comprehensive picture of the objectives, commitments and risks of the United States in relationship to our military power, as it affects the national security. This will provide a sound basis for the formulation of domestic, foreign and military policies and for the conduct of affairs in a consistent and farsighted manner required by our position of world leadership and in the interest of world peace and our own national security.

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Sidney William Souers is Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. Immediately prior to this appointment he, in the capacity of consultant, recently completed a survey of intelligence requirements of the Atomic Energy Commission and proposed a program which has been adopted by the Commission and the National Intelligence Authority. He previously participated in the formulation of plans for the creating of the National Intelligence Authority and its implementing agency, the Central Intelligence Group, of which he was appointed the first Director. He served in this capacity until it was fully operative and a permanent Director was appointed.

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James Selden Lay, Jr. is Assistant Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. From December 1946 to September 1947 he was Chief of the Projects Division of the Office of Reports and Estimates of the Central Intelligence Group, having served previously as Secretary, National Intelligence Authority. Prior to his connection with the National Intelligence Authority he was a Management Analyst for the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State in Charge of Research and Intelligence.

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